

STATE OF ALASKA

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION AND PUBLIC FACILITIES DIVISION OF STATEWIDE PLANNING

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Mr. Walt Wrede, Borough Manager
Lake and Peninsula Borough
P.O. Box 495
King Salmon, AK 99613

Walt
Dear Mr. Wrede:

This letter is in response to your letters of September 18 and November 10 concerning the pre-draft STIP, Draft STIP and related matters. Thanks for taking the time to write two of the more thoughtful and insightful letters we received.

Transportation Needs and Priorities List

You made several specific comments about corrections to the Needs List. These are being addressed. The cross-peninsula highway will be added to the Needs List following completion of the Southwest Alaska Transportation Plan.

Statewide Transportation Improvement Process

Concerning the Williamsport to Pile Bay road, as you know, this project is under active consideration in the Southwest Alaska Transportation Plan. We have identified possible road improvements, including a road extension along the north shore of Lake Illiamna and beyond, as well as a possible ferry which could serve a possible new link between Homer and Williamsport. You can download a copy of this report off our web site at the following web address:

ftp://ftp.dot.state.ak.us/pub/planning/SW_alts/home.html

We understand that you feel the scoring process was subverted when this project was removed from the active STIP process. I think the real error was in scoring the project initially. It has strong merit, once a complete transportation system is identified, but as a single link we don't believe it would be eligible for federal funds. At the Pile Bay end, the road apparently ends in private property. Thus it does not fit the description of a public road with logical termini. As such federal funds would be withheld. We also believe it should be viewed in the full context of possible improvements for Southwest Alaska. As you know, there are other important needs in the region, and this broader view is the essence of the regional planning process. We have also withheld projects in the Juneau Access and Cordova Copper River corridors pending the outcome of planning and environmental studies. We're well aware of the current and potential importance this

route might play to both the Kenai Peninsula Borough and communities west of Cook Inlet. It will be given a high level of consideration as the plan is finalized.

It's premature to speculate on what the plan will recommend regarding this project, but it is accurate to say that there are a large number of supporters for improving the road. Currently, regardless of the plan's final recommendation, our Maintenance and Operations manager for Central Region, Mr. Chris Kepler, is seeking funds for interim bridge improvements. Such improvements would go a long way to re-establishing this link as an important freight and boat haul route.

Your more recent comments are indeed encouraged, as a project such as this will be best organized as a public partnership between the Borough and the state. It is good to see the local matching funds materialize and your Borough's progress on the land ownership issues at either end of this road. Progress on these issues will clearly help advance the project.

Chignik Inter-Village Road

We met with the communities in October and visited both Chignik and Port Heiden. The Southwest Transportation Plan is actively considering this project. The offers of right-of-way and possible maintenance are important factors in our decision making process, as you know. We will look forward to the prospect of a maintenance proposal over the next few months.

Proposed State Highway System

Your distinction between current state roads serving local needs, and yet unconstructed roads that would serve state needs is apparent to us as well. Our oft-stated policy is to eventually transfer to local government all roads that do not serve broader state transportation needs. As you know, making the transition will be a matter of logic, politics and funding.

While the funding allocation between the new State Highway System and the Community Transportation Program may seem tenuous, the reality is that, short of establishing the relative funding levels in regulation, any state administration or legislature could change the balance. Although your concern is about the SHS growing at the expense of the CTP, my observation is that legislators are primarily concerned about local projects, which is one of the factors that led to the creation of the SHS in the first place. I would worry more about the CTP growing at the expense of the SHS over time, especially as some of the higher priority projects are completed.

Regarding criteria for the SHS, we agreed with your comments, at least in part. The Palmer to Wasillia Highway was deleted in the final version of our SHS policy, as were other routes. The functional classifications are in fact carefully defined, and are not changed easily without careful analysis, done in our division, and approval of the Federal Highway Administration.

I agree that the Illiamna to Nondalton road is a potential candidate for the SHS. Once a final decision is made on the environmental approval, this road can be considered for the SHS. Adding roads to the SHS will be spelled out as we move from creating the SHS program to active implementation.

I thank you for taking the time to write and look forward to continuing the dialog on the STIP process and the Borough's high-priority projects.

Sincerely,



Tom Brigham
Director

CC: Joseph L. Perkins, P.E., Commissioner
John Tolley, Central Region Planning Chief
Chris Kepler, PE, Central Region Maintenance and Operations